

United States Senate

March 15, 2017

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis,

I write to ask that you declassify the military records of a proud Navy veteran who served his nation honorably, but cannot receive the healthcare and disability compensation benefits he deserves because his records remain unjustly classified.

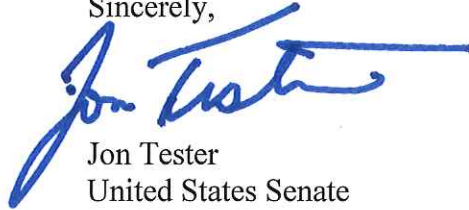
John Olsen, of Billings, Montana, served four years in the United States Navy and, during his time on active duty, John was stationed aboard the *Large Tug 2085*, which was part of the Project 112 Shipboard Hazard and Defense program (SHAD). Project SHAD was a series of tests conducted by the Department of Defense (DOD) from 1962 to 1974 to test the vulnerability of naval vessels and personnel to chemical and biological attacks. These tests included bombarding the ships with chemical and biological agents, simulants of those agents, and providing the crew with dozens of immunizations.

John's status as a SHAD veteran qualifies him for Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare in Priority Group 6, but he was denied service connection for his four battles with cancer, which include prostate, renal, squamous skin, and basal skin cancers. In order for John to appeal his case to the Board of Veterans Appeals, he needs and deserves to have access to the evidence of the tests in which he participated, including the dozens of immunizations he received.

John Olsen's issue speaks to a larger problem of over classification by the executive branch. When American veterans are dying and suffering from poor health because the evidence they need to file a claim is classified, then clearly this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. As you may be aware, the Department of Defense officially denied the existence of Project SHAD until 1998. This has created a great mistrust among the surviving veterans of Project SHAD, a mistrust that the DOD can remedy by providing the unclassified and unfiltered military records for these veterans.

In order for Americans to have faith and confidence in the institutions designed to protect them, those institutions must demonstrate that they are deserving of that trust and that starts with keeping faith with our veterans. I thank you for your time and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Tester
United States Senate